(c) longitudinally spaced laterally extending lines of weakness in one of the first or second layer, and

(d) longitudinally spaced laterally extending lines of separation in the other first or second layer with the lines of separation paired with the lines of weakness.

39. (New) The article of claim 38 wherein the first layer defines a surface area and the entire surface area of the first layer is effective for preventing passage of microbes through the layer and permitting the passage of a sterilization gas.

40. (New) An article of commerce comprising a longitudinally continuous web having a longitudinal down-web direction, a lateral cross-web direction, and lateral ends, with:

(a) superimposed first and second layers sealingly engaged along one lateral end, wherein both the first and second layers are effective for preventing passage of microbes through the layer and at least the first layer is effective for permitting the passage of a sterilization gas, and

(b) a longitudinally spaced series of paired laterally extending lines of weakness in the first and second layers, and

(c) wherein the first and second layers are sealed along a pair of laterally extending seal lines located proximate each paired lines of weakness with the individual laterally extending seal lines in each pair of laterally extending seal lines separated by a paired lines of weakness.

41. (New) The article of claim 40 wherein the first layer defines a surface area and the entire surface area of the first layer is effective for preventing passage of microbes through the layer and permitting the passage of a sterilization gas.

42. (New) An automated method of packaging a medical device, comprising:

(a) obtaining a longitudinally continuous web defining a plurality of breather pouches, including a leading pouch and an immediately trailing pouch; wherein:

(i) each pouch has lateral sides, a leading longitudinal end and a trailing longitudinal end, and is comprised of superimposed first and second layers sealingly engaged along and proximate both lateral sides and the leading end so as to define a retention chamber, wherein both the first and second layers are effective for preventing passage of microbes through the layer and at least the first layer is effective for permitting the passage of a sterilization gas,

(ii) successive pouches are connected along laterally extending lines of weakness in the first layer,

(b) automatically conveying the web in a machine direction until the leading pouch is positioned at a fill location,

(c) automatically transversely separating the first and second layers of the leading pouch along the trailing end of the leading pouch so as to open the trailing end of the leading pouch and thereby facilitate access to the retention chamber defined by the leading pouch,

(d) placing a medical device within the retention chamber defined by the leading pouch through the open trailing end of the leading pouch,

(e) sealing the trailing end of the leading pouch with the medical device retained within the retention chamber,

(f) automatically detaching the leading pouch from the trailing pouch along the line of weakness in the first layer between the leading pouch and the immediately trailing pouch after step (d), and

(g) repeating steps (b) through (f) for subsequent pouches in the web.

43. (New) The method of claim 42 wherein the first layer defines a surface area and the entire surface area of the first layer is effective for preventing passage of microbes through the layer and permitting the passage of a sterilization gas.

44. (New) An automated method of packaging a medical device, comprising:

(a) obtaining a longitudinally continuous web defining a plurality of breather pouches, including a leading pouch and an immediately trailing pouch; wherein:

(i) each pouch has a first lateral end, a second lateral end, a leading longitudinal side and a trailing longitudinal side, and is comprised of superimposed first and second layers sealingly engaged along both longitudinal sides and the first lateral end so as to define a retention chamber, wherein both the first and second layers are effective for preventing passage of microbes through the layer and at least the first layer is effective for permitting the passage of a sterilization gas,

(ii) successive pouches are connected along paired laterally extending lines of weakness in the first and second layers,

(b) automatically conveying the web in a machine direction until the leading pouch is positioned at a fill location,

(c) automatically transversely separating the second layer of the leading pouch from the first layer of the leading pouch along the second end of the leading pouch so as to open the second end of the leading pouch and thereby facilitate access to the retention chamber defined by the leading pouch,

(d) placing a medical device within the retention chamber defined by the leading pouch through the open second end of the leading pouch,

(e) sealing the second end of the leading pouch with the medical device retained within the retention chamber,

(f) automatically detaching the leading pouch from the trailing pouch along the lines of weakness in the first and second layers between the leading pouch and the immediately trailing pouch after step (d), and

(g) repeating steps (b) through (f) for subsequent pouches in the web.

45. (New) The method of claim 44 wherein the first layer defines a surface area and the entire surface area of the first layer is effective for preventing passage of microbes through the layer and permitting the passage of a sterilization gas.

46. (New) The article of claim 1 wherein the first layer is constructed entirely from a gas permeable microbial barrier material.

47. (New) The article of claim 15 wherein the first layer is constructed entirely from a gas permeable microbial barrier material.

48. (New) The method of claim 25 wherein the first layer is constructed entirely from a gas permeable microbial barrier material.

49. (New) The method of claim 32 wherein the first layer is constructed entirely from a gas permeable microbial barrier material.

Respectfully submitted,

Date 12 Nov 01

By _____

Michael S. Sherrill, #32,302
SHERRILL LAW OFFICES
4756 Banning Avenue, Suite 212
White Bear Lake, Minnesota 55110-3205
(651) 426-2400